

Evaluating Vocabulary Presentation in CEFR Get Smart Plus 4 in Malaysia

Tan Hon Kian, Kokilavathi Paramesvaran, Tharani
Paramasivam, Selvakumari Sandrasakeran

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Malaysia

Email: tanhonkian@gmail.com, kokila.param58@gmail.com, tharani2903@gmail.com,
selvakumari2103@gmail.com

Abstract

Textbooks play a vital role as the teaching and learning resources for both English as Second Language (ESL) educators and learners. A number of studies have been conducted to evaluate the Malaysian EL textbooks. However, studies focused on vocabulary in Malaysian CEFR primary school textbooks are still limited. Therefore, this research intends to address the identified research gaps through evaluating vocabulary presentation in CEFR Get Smart Plus 4, a textbook widely used among Malaysian Year 4 learners. The study aims to identify the usefulness of the vocabulary presentation provided in the textbook. A mixed method explanatory design was selected for the study. A group of ESL educators was chosen via purposive sampling technique to collect information regarding the subject matter. The textbook evaluation checklist on vocabulary was distributed among 48 respondents while 3 educators were interviewed via semi-structured interview protocols to obtain further information. The result of the study uncovered a moderate usage of the vocabulary presentation in the targeted textbook as proven in the overall mean of 2.74 (SD=0.71). Hence, the vocabulary presentation in the textbook is purposeful. As for the future studies, the researchers can widen the sample size and focus on the other language skills.

Keywords: Textbook, Evaluation, ESL

Introduction

English is one of the languages that is commonly used across the world (Sioco & Vera, 2018). Globally, children are imparted and encouraged to learn English as a Second Language (ESL). In Malaysia, English Language (EL) is placed as a second language (L2) with reference to the Malaysian education system in line with the education policy. It is an indisputable fact that EL plays a significant role in Malaysia Education and the use of language has increased tremendously. Hence, the use of EL in the Malaysian education system has evolved over the years and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was implemented in Malaysia. Hussin et al (2015) stressed that the use of textbooks in the classroom is able to assist teachers in teaching and learning practice in enhancing learners' vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, it is vital to evaluate the quality of textbooks as it is a reliable resource for teachers and learners.

Literature Review

Table 1.

The principles of vocabulary teaching in ESL classrooms

Appropriate load of vocabulary in ESL textbooks	(Alqahtani, 2015)
Balance of simple and complex words in the textbook	(Dakhi & Fitria, 2019)
There should be a balance of vocabulary presentation in the textbook	(Ismail et al., 2017)
Consist of adequate exercises for vocabulary learning	(Nation, 2001)
Contextualisation of vocabulary boosts the learners' confidence to comprehend the meaning independently	(Alqahtani, 2015)
The choice of vocabulary in textbooks should be suitable to be contextualised in order to assist students to understand the vocabulary	(Rapaport, 2004)
Vocabulary practices in the textbooks are the tools that teachers use to assist learners' vocabulary acquisition (Topical nature).	(Mohd Tahir et al., 2020)
The specific method to teach new vocabulary sentences and examples that define new vocabulary that are familiar to learners and index of new vocabulary at the end of the textbooks	(Mat Hussin et al., 2016)
Vocabulary can be learned effectively if the learners are given some level of reiteration, especially slow learners.	(Ismail et al., 2017)
At the same time, the use of visuals is able to help students to recall the vocabulary that has been read in the textbook.	(Ismail et al., 2017)
Teachers could utilize their imagination to urge students to learn new words in various sorts of exercises	(Ismail et al., 2017)

Vocabulary can be described as the total number of words that need to be acquired to convey ideas and articulate utterers' meaning in a context (Alqahtani, 2015; Alfaki, 2015). Acquisition of vocabulary plays a crucial role in mastering language skills. Table 1 illustrates the principles of vocabulary teaching in ESL classrooms. These principals show that there should be an appropriate vocabulary presentation in ESL textbooks based on the various studies conducted in the past.

Likewise, there has been various research conducted on ESL textbook evaluation (Ayu & Indrawati, 2018; Budiarsih, 2022; Hakim et al., 2020; Katawazai et al., 2019). However, the evaluation of ESL primary school textbooks in Malaysia is limited. Although there are studies conducted in Malaysia on ESL textbook evaluation (Mat Hussin et al., 2015; Johar & Abdul Aziz, 2019), limited research conducted on Malaysian CEFR primary school textbook focusing on vocabulary. Hence, this study is able to bridge the research gap by examining vocabulary presentation in CEFR Get Smart Plus 4 which is used among Year 4 learners in Malaysia.

Methods

This study employs descriptive mixed-method research. Mixed methods design involves combining or integration of qualitative and quantitative research and data in a research study

to answer the research questions formulated (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Here, the qualitative data were conducted to support and further describe the quantitative data obtained.

Methodology

In this study, the qualitative data are gathered to provide further details to the quantitative data obtained. 48 ESL primary school teachers in Johor Bahru were selected via purposive sampling technique as they were actively involved in using the targeted textbook. Furthermore, a textbook evaluation checklist and semi-structured interview protocol were employed to achieve the aim of the study. A Checklist for Evaluating Vocabulary Presentation in CEFR Get Smart Plus 4, adapted from three existing textbook evaluation checklists (Mat Hussin et al., 2015; Mukundan et al., 2011), was distributed among the respondents. The checklist described the usefulness of the criteria focused. The quantitative data gathered were then analysed using an analysis tool, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Moreover, a semi-structured interview protocol consisting of eight questions deeply investigates the respondents' beliefs, perspectives, and opinions on the presentation of vocabulary in the textbook. Thematic analysis was utilised to manage and highlight the finding in the qualitative data.

Data Analysis

The textbook evaluation checklist (Hussin et al., 2015) gathered quantitative data. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation (SD) were generated using an analysis tool which was Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Moreover, semi-structured interview protocols contributed to qualitative data which provided the researcher in-depth information to support the quantitative results and deliver more inputs on the suggestions of improving the presentation of new vocabulary in the targeted textbook. In this study, thematic analysis was conducted to manage the overarching data obtained in the interview sessions. Table 2 shows the summary of data collection methods and data analysis methods employed in the present study.

Table 2

Matrix of Data Collection and Data Analysis Method

Research Questions	Data Collection Methods	Data Analysis Methods
RQ1: How useful is the vocabulary presentation delivered in CEFR Get Smart Plus 4?	1. Textbook evaluation checklist 2. Semi-structured interview protocols (to support the checklist)	Descriptive analysis (frequency, percentage, mean, and SD) Thematic analysis

Results

Textbook evaluation checklist and semi-structured interview protocol were administered to collect relevant data from a group of respondents. This section further deliberates the findings and discussion obtained based on the following research questions:

Research question 1: How useful is the vocabulary presentation delivered in CEFR Get Smart Plus 4?

Table 3
Frequency Table of Textbook Evaluation Checklist

Items	Frequency, <i>f</i> (percentage, %)					Mean (\bar{x})	SD.	Level of Mean
	1 (TL)	2 (P)	3 (S)	4 (G)	5 (E)			
ITEM 1	-	-	15 (31.25)	27 (56.25)	6 (12.50)	2.81	0.64	High usefulness
ITEM 2	-	1 (2.08)	17 (35.42)	24 (50.00)	6 (12.50)	2.73	0.71	Moderate usefulness
ITEM 3	-	-	18 (37.50)	26 (54.17)	4 (8.33)	2.71	0.62	Moderate usefulness
ITEM 4	-	3 (6.25)	19 (39.58)	23 (47.92)	3 (6.25)	2.54	0.71	Moderate usefulness
ITEM 5	-	-	14 (29.17)	30 (62.50)	4 (8.33)	2.79	0.58	Moderate usefulness
ITEM 6	-	-	9 (18.75)	20 (41.67)	19 (39.58)	3.21	0.74	High usefulness
ITEM 7	-	4 (8.33)	11 (22.92)	29 (60.42)	4 (8.33)	2.69	0.75	Moderate usefulness
ITEM 8	2 (4.17)	5 (10.42)	14 (29.17)	23 (47.92)	4 (8.33)	2.46	0.94	Moderate usefulness
ITEM 9	-	2 (4.17)	20 (41.67)	24 (50.00)	2 (4.17)	2.54	0.65	Moderate usefulness
ITEM 10	1 (2.08)	-	10 (20.83)	27 (56.25)	10 (20.83)	2.94	0.78	High usefulness

Discussions

Based on the data collected, it was found, the majority of the respondents agreed that the load and number of new vocabularies in every lesson is appropriate to the linguistic level of the learners. This indicated that the textbook was highly useful in introducing appropriate new vocabulary in the lessons. This was supported by the data gathered via interview session and Alfaki (2015); Alqahtani (2015) that the number of words in ESL textbooks should be appropriate for all types of learners. Besides that, most of the respondents also mentioned there is a balance of simple and complex words in the textbook. This was further revealed in the interviews and research proposed by Ismail et al (2017); Dakhi and Fitria (2019) as they have highlighted there should be a balance between simple and complex words in ESL textbooks.

In addition, the majority of the respondents also agreed that the vocabulary practices are rich and sufficient. This finding was further highlighted by the interviews and Nation (2001); Tahir and Mohtar (2016) that proved that exercises for vocabulary are adequate for long term vocabulary retention among learners. Moreover, almost half of the respondents also agreed that new words are repeated across the book for delayed recall. This finding aligned with the interview session that showed the textbook reuses the targeted words across the textbook efficiently so that the learners are able to recall the topics and words learned. The result is further highlighted by Ismail et al (2017) that the frequent repetition of new vocabulary in various contexts in ESL textbooks solidifies them in their memory.

Furthermore, majority of the respondents agreed that the words in the textbook are contextualised which was supported in the data gathered during the interview session and

study conducted by Rapaport (2004), contextualised vocabularies in ESL textbooks are appropriate and help the learners to acquire varied words. Apart from that, it was also found that the respondents expressed that the textbook is highly useful in using visuals to present the contextualised new words which was acknowledged by the interview and research conducted by Ismail et.al (2017) that emphasized the visuals presented in the ESL textbooks are helpful for the students to recall the vocabulary.

Majority of respondents also claimed that the topical nature of the vocabulary exercises is often meaningful to the students. This was further supported by the interviews, that the themes, topics and examples for the vocabulary in the textbook are recent and reflect real-life situations. However, the findings were contradicting to Mohd Tahir et al (2020) that the vocabulary practices included in ESL textbooks do not cater various learners with different proficiency levels. The result differs maybe due to the respondents' interest and preferences. Next, most of the respondents agreed that there is a specific method to teach new vocabulary. The result was further supported by the interview session and this is also parallel with the research conducted by Ismail et al (2017), which proposed using a variety of language activities in the ESL textbook helps the learners to memorise new words and gain a better focus on the vocabulary learning process.

Half of the respondents agreed that the sentences and examples that define new vocabulary use words that are known by learners which was aligned with the findings in interview sessions and study conducted by Hussin et al (2016) that deliberated sentences and examples that define new vocabulary presented in ESL textbooks are familiar to the learners. Lastly, majority of the respondents also agreed that there is an index of new vocabulary at the end of the textbook which aligned with the findings gathered via interviews and further proved by Hussin et al (2016) that the index in ESL textbook is essential in identifying new words used in each unit for both teachers and the learners.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study disclosed that the vocabulary presentation in CEFR Get Smart Plus 4 textbook is moderately useful for both ESL teachers and learners. The results of the finding provided insights to the teachers and educators in adapting, adopting, and utilising the textbook in their planning and lesson deliveries. In the future research, it is recommended that the evaluation checklist can be varied in investigating different language skills. Larger sample size can provide a more significant result and allow the researchers to generalise the finding.

Limitations and Future Studies

However, a few limitations were identified after conducting the research. First of all, this study only focused on vocabulary component. It is recommended that the evaluation can be done on different language components and skills such as grammar and reading. Apart from that, the current study was only conducted in a smaller size which could not be generalised. A larger sample size can be chosen for a data collection purpose for future studies. Besides that, a different level textbook can be selected for the evaluation purposes rather than CEFR Get Smart Plus 4 textbook.

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